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FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7272
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA IMMEDIATE 0019
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 0073
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA IMMEDIATE 0010
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA IMMEDIATE 0009
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA IMMEDIATE 0004
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE 0009
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE 0005
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE 0006

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002012

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA & EUR/CARC

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TAGS: PREL PGOV GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA MISSILE ATTACK UPDATE -- AUGUST 10

REF: TBILISI 1993

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark X. Perry for reasons 1.4(b&d).

Summary

¶1. (C) U.S. military experts arrived August 10 to review the evidence related to the August 6 missile impact in Georgia. Other international experts are expected to arrive in coming days, as the Georgian government begins to put together an international team to provide transparency to the investigation. The commander of the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF), Russian General Murat Kulakhmetov, has put together a new report claiming the planes came from the east (i.e., Georgian territory), rather than the north as indicated in the first JPKF monitoring report August 7, but Georgia and OSCE have refused to sign the new report. End Summary.

Experts Assemble

¶2. (C) EUCOM air control and munitions experts arrived in Tbilisi August 10, and will begin their stay by meeting with Georgian officials. They will participate in the international evaluation team that the Georgians are assembling (reftel), and will not provide their assessment to the Georgian government before that time, although they will share it with post and we will report as soon as it is available. Charge will meet late on August 10 with officials from the Georgian Ministries of Defense, Internal Affairs, and Foreign Affairs, to discuss how the international team will work. Thus far Lithuania, the U.S., and Sweden have committed to providing experts. Poland, Croatia, and Latvia have expressed interest but have not yet committed.

¶3. (C) Foreign Minister Bezhushvili told Charge August 9 that he had called his counterparts in Armenia and Azerbaijan to request any radar records to corroborate the data from the Georgian military and civilian radar systems. The Armenians have responded that they do not have radar coverage of the area in question. The Azerbaijanis have not yet answered, but Bezhushvili acknowledged to Charge that this is a sensitive political issue for them.

Kulakhmetov's Alternative Investigation

¶4. (C) Georgian media have given extensive coverage to a contested second report by JPKF monitors, which suggests the planes came from the east, rather than the north. OSCE's Jurgen Schmidt explained the sequence of events to us August

10, noting that the first JPKF-OSCE monitoring visit to the area had taken place August 7, and that all three parties to the JPKF (Russia, North Ossetia, and Georgia) had signed a report documenting the evidence and eyewitness accounts they collected. OSCE then signed the report as an observer, and used it as the basis for OSCE's own spot report, noting that Ossetian eyewitnesses confirmed the aircraft came from the north. Kulakhmetov then conducted a second monitoring visit August 8, and drafted a new report citing witnesses claiming the aircraft came from the east. Georgian peacekeepers refused to sign this report. The Russians took the draft to OSCE to sign, but OSCE refused because the Georgians had not signed first. Following this episode, the Georgians refused to permit Kulakhmetov to conduct a third monitoring visit August 9.

¶ 15. (C) Schmidt indicated to us that OSCE was irritated that the Russian JPKF had apparently leaked the unapproved second report to western media, where it had been portrayed as an OSCE report demonstrating that the planes came from the east. Georgian officials have publicly blasted the Russian report, with State Minister for Conflict Resolution David Bakradze quoted as saying it was "a little spectacle staged by the Russian side," based on the alleged testimony of four elderly villagers who live outside the zone of conflict -- suggesting that the JPKF had violated its mandate in interviewing them.

Comment

¶ 16. (C) It appears that Kulakhmetov may be scrambling to try to undo some of his decisions on August 7, the first day of the investigation, especially his decision to sign the report quoting witnesses that the planes came from the north. The

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Georgians have put great public emphasis on that report, which is embarrassingly at odds with the current Russian position that the aircraft came from the east. Kulakhmetov may be under pressure for other decisions as well: a Georgian government insider told Charge August 9 that the Georgians believe the Russians may be about to fire Kulakhmentov for making a statement to OSCE that the South Ossetians fired a rocket at the aircraft thinking it was Georgian. Reportedly, a high-level Russian official went to Tskhinvali August 8 to talk to Kulakhmetov with that purpose in mind.

PERRY